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1962/10/23

October 23rd, 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE

SUBJECT: Meetings with Senator Russell, Senator Hickenlooper,
and Chairman Vinson

1. At the President's request I contacted several members of the leadership of the Congress with the following results. In a meeting on August 23rd, Senator Russell indicated a less critical attitude toward Administration policy than was evident at the leadership meeting the night before. He in general approved the plan of actions, indicating strong reservations concerning the effectiveness and the utility of the blockade, expressed serious concern over the Soviet/U.S. confrontation which would result from the blockade, and accepted the course of action only because it would lead to the next phase which would be that of taking the missiles and offensive weapons out of Cuba at a time and by means of our own determination. Russell favored more positive action against Cuba which would involve not only air strike but invasion. In the initial part of the discussion he felt the President's speech had not established a clear-cut right for military action; however, by careful reference to the speech (a copy of which I had with me) he agreed that the wording did give the President right of action without further notification. In general, Russell's attitude was considerably different than the leadership meeting and might be summed up as reserved approval.

During the conversation, I outlined my feelings that our purposes must be to remove the missiles and also to remove Castro as is outlined in a separate memorandum,

2. Senator Hickenlooper approved the speech, the action, and the anticipated further action without reservation. He expressed confidence in the President as did Senator Russell but serious reservations concerning some of the President's advisors who he felt would influence the President to follow a very weak and compromising line. However, it appeared to me that Hickenlooper was greatly relieved by the speech and more satisfied with our Cuban policy than was evident at the leadership meeting.

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3. Chairman Vinson stated that he thought the speech was good. He approved it but he had concluded that military action would be necessary and this he heartily approved. Vinson feels that we must dispose of the Castro problem as well as the missiles. In this regard, I outlined my feelings as covered by separate memorandum. Vinson tended to review the activities of the Navy with Admiral Anderson and others, insisting that we must be sure that we are going to do enough, that our blockade is going to be effective, and that if we invade, we must invade with great force, an assured victory, quick victory, otherwise Cuban resistance will be rallied and our casualties will be great. He stated that 250,000 men would be not enough, that it would take 500,000 men; that we should land at least 10 or more points in Cuba at one time, and if we did this, the entire Cuban population would come to our side.

Note: Both Vinson and Russell were very inquisitive as to the position of the Joint Chiefs. I explained this as expressed by Taylor, pointing out that their position of a sudden unannounced military strike was reasonable in view of their responsibilities, however, it must also be recognized that civilians with broader responsibilities, i.e. military and political as well, necessarily had to moderate the JCS view. I stated that I felt the JCS view would insure the most successful military operations with the least American losses but that I opposed it and felt that the military handicaps resulting from our course of action (in military operations) must be reverted to, can be overcome by increase in the weight of the military operation. None of the three felt that we should have undertaken a surprise attack; however, Russell in particular felt that a warning and a following military operation might have been preferable to the blockade. I pointed out that the warning now had been given and action could be taken now "at a time of our own choosing and by means of our own determination" and after again reviewing the wording of the speech, Russell agreed this was correct.

JOHN A. MCCONE

JAM/mfb

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